

REAL ACADEMIA DE BELLAS ARTES DE SAN FERNANDO

## BUSCAR DENODADAMENTE LA BELLEZA

DISCURSO DEL ACADÉMICO ELECTO  
EXCMO. SR. D. ALBERTO CAMPO BAEZA

Leído en el acto de su Recepción Pública  
el día  
30 de Noviembre de 2014

Y CONTESTACIÓN DEL  
EXCMO. SR. D. JUAN BORDES CABALLERO



MADRID  
MMXIV



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ENGLISH VERSION

by Penny Eades

RELENTLESSLY SEEKING BEAUTY

ADDRESS

BY

H. E. MR. ALBERTO CAMPO BAEZA

Thank you, thank you very much.

Firstly I should like to thank the academicians who elected me. With all my heart I thank them for their generosity.

I should like to especially mention Alfredo Pérez de Armiñán, Francisco Calvo Serraller and Tomás Marco, who did me the honour of presenting me.

To all, my grateful thanks.

In the first letter that I addressed to all the members of this Academy, in fulfillment of the acceptance requirements for this medal, I quoted Mr. Luis Moya Blanco. I must say that that it was quite emotional for me to learn that this medal nº 38 which I am now being honored with was awarded to Mr. Luis Moya Blanco as Member of the San Fernando Royal Academy of Fine Arts in 1953. He was Chairman of the Board that judged my Doctoral Thesis in 1982, over 30 years ago. Other members of that board were Mr. Fernando Chueca Goitia, who had been a teacher of mine, Mr. Francisco Javier Sáenz de Oiza, who introduced me to the ETSAM, Mr. Javier Carvajal Ferrer, who was my thesis director, and Mr. Juan Daniel Fullaondo Errazu, who acted as secretary. As is widely known, all of them were eminent architects and Spanish University Professors whom I recall with enormous admiration, gratitude and affection.



To José Luis Fernández del Amo, the centenary of whose birth we recently celebrated, who held this medal nº 38 after Luis Moya, and was one of the great architects of his generation. His work is of the highest quality, that of a true maestro.

To José Luis Picardo who held this medal nº 38 immediately before me, and who was an outstanding figure of Modern Architecture in Spain. A universal figure from Jerez in the province of Cadiz, he was not only an excellent architect but also a true gentleman. I was introduced to him by Julio Cano Lasso and he displayed great kindness. His inaugural speech to this Academy which he titled *Hippolytus*, was full of Homeric aromas. Author of the March Foundation building in Madrid and of many Paradors like that of Santa Catalina in Jaén, his work was always extremely elegant.

To Javier Carvajal who was awarded the Architecture Gold Medal in 2012, a few months before he died. The ceremony took place in this Academy, in this same hall where I had the honor of delivering the corresponding Laudation. I shall repeat now what I said at the time: he should have been an academic member of this Institution. And along with him, Oíza and Sota and Fisac. To them, my maestros, I should like to dedicate this medal.

To my grandfather, the architect Emilio Baeza Eguiluz, who was a leading architect in Valladolid at the beginning of the last century, where he built such lovely buildings as the Casino in Duque de la Victoria street. He belonged

to this Academy in his own right. On folio 178 rev. of the Register of Master Architects of this Real Academy, dated 14 December 1897, he figures as number 418. He will be smiling down from heaven seeing his grandson entering this house. My mother, María Teresa Baeza Alonso, one of his 8 daughters, efficiently inoculated me with the poison of Architecture! To her, of course, I dedicate all this.

To my father, Juvencio Campo Fernández, who died last year at the age of 104 with a clear head and a heart of gold. He was assistant professor of Anatomy at the Faculty of Medicine in Valladolid where, had he not been moved to Cadiz following the war, he would have become Professor. I have in my possession certificates from his career attesting to 19 First Class Honors. And on the last two of these, instead of First Class Honors, the professor wrote Admirable. And in truth he was admirable, (*"son, these things don't count"*). To him, to my admirable father, I dedicate this medal in a very special way.

And after these unavoidable but joyful excursus, I shall now proceed with my compulsory address.

## RELENTLESSLY SEEKING BEAUTY

*Quid est ergo pulchrum?*

*Et quid est pulchritudo?*

*“Do we perchance love anything but the beautiful? What then is the beautiful? And what is beauty? What is it that allures and unites us to the things we love; for unless there were a grace and beauty in them, they could not possibly attract us to them?”*

Saint Augustine, *Confessions*. IV.13. 44

### **Purpose**

After many years working as an architect, teaching as a university professor and putting my ideas on paper, the reasons why I do my work, I must confess that what I truly seek with all my heart, with all my soul, relentlessly, is beauty.

Can an architect confess this so overtly? Can any creator state outright that what he is seeking is beauty? That is what poets and musicians and painters and sculptors do, what all artists do. Many of the academicians here today know that full well.

To state that beauty is the goal of Architecture could seem rather risky. But I am convinced that by achieving beauty in architecture we can achieve, with this “*art with necessary reason*” as the classics used to say, a happier place for mankind.

To achieve *Venustas*, having previously fulfilled the requirements of *Utilitas* and *Firmitas*, is the best way of making people happier, which is not only the aim of Architecture but that of all creative work. Sáenz de Oíza explained it better than me in *The Dream of Paradise* when he said: *"I declare that the works of Architecture are instruments for transforming reality into a splendid and regained Paradise from which through our own fault we were expelled and which we have again been readmitted to thanks to the powers of transformation of Architecture"*. *Venustas*, beauty, to regain Paradise lost, happiness.

Or when Carvajal spoke of *"orderly beauty"* and his *"desire to create efficiency and beauty at the same time such as only true architects seek to do"*. *"The beauty that we contemplate, being ours, we can use to engender beauty, operatively, in our works. Thus beauty becomes 'motor' and not just 'consequence'"*.

Over the past number of years I have written about many of the masters of Spanish Contemporary Architecture and, in attempting to summarize all that seemed to me most substantial in them, I developed those texts under the heading of beauty. Bald beauty for Sota, volcanic beauty for Oíza, chiseled beauty for Carvajal, rebellious beauty for Fisac and beauty itself for Barragán. It was my understanding then that beauty was the cause and the aim of the creative work of the masters. And now, with the passage of time, I see it with ever greater clarity. Beauty!

### **Reason. Cervantes, Goya, Goethe.**

And beauty in architecture is guided by Reason. I have defended and still defend reason as the architect's primary and principal tool in order to achieve beauty.

Because although this may be true for all the arts, it is most imperatively so for Architecture, because of its inherent ineluctable seriousness.

Cervantes. Those who have read Don Quixote do not usually pause at those exceptional pages with which Cervantes prefaces his universal work. And Cervantes confesses himself that he wrote the prologue later. And he also confesses that it is the piece of writing to which he devoted most time. Cervantes wrote: *"Idle reader: thou mayest believe me without any oath that I would this book, as it is the child of my brain, were the fairest, gayest, and cleverest that could be imagined"*. So, having made it clear that reason was his principal work tool, he declares his determined desire to capture beauty with it.

When I wrote that architecture is a built idea, I was merely making the claim that architecture, and any creative work, must be the product of thought, of reason, and of understanding, as we read in Cervantes.

And when that reason is missing, then curious architectures appear which, being so often "against nature", produce the amazement and the adoration of a society such as ours that bows before these works as if they were the temples of a new religion.

**Goya.** *"The sleep of reason produces monsters"* Goya tells us in the marvelous aquatint that presides over the office of the director of this Academy. It is number 43 of the 80 etchings that make up the series of *Los Caprichos* published by Goya in 1799. The original plate is still conserved and on display in this Academy. Goya also wrote a text, in the form of a list of comments, the original of which is conserved, curiously enough, not in the Academy but in the Archive of the Prado Museum. In this text, when he reaches etching 43 Goya writes: *"Fantasy abandoned by reason produces impossible monsters"*, but goes on to say that *"united with her, she is the mother of the arts and the origin of their marvels"*. In other words, reason needs imagination to open the doors to beauty. How could we not agree with Goya!

God forbid that I should wish to compare myself with Cervantes or with Goya, but it is with this spirit with which I have wished and still wish to build all my works: trying to conquer beauty with all my soul, with the arms of reason and of imagination. With the dour desire to endure as the primary impulse of creation, as Paul Eluard tells us. With the intention of remaining in the memory of humankind. Or as Federico García Lorca said with such simple and lovely words: *"I write to be loved"*.

Goethe. And it would seem that Goethe had an agreement with Cervantes and Goya concerning the defense of reason as the best pathway to beauty when he affirmed, referring to the painters of the time, that *"the artist's brush*

*should be dipped in reason*", adding thereafter: "*and architects in Winckelmann*". It would appear that the Academy has been listening to Goethe with its publication recently of the *History of Ancient Art* by Johann Joachim Winckelmann in a beautiful edition at the hand of Diego Antonio Rejón de Silva, who was an Honorary Member of this Royal Academy of San Fernando. Goethe, tired of the unreasonable digressions being produced around him, strongly advocated the recovery of reason with his resounding words.

### **Plato, Saint Augustine, Saint Thomas.**

Reason as man's primary tool in achieving beauty. But what is beauty? In *The Banquet*, Plato proposed beauty as the splendor of truth.

Over the centuries further nuances were added to this proposal by other thinkers who, starting out from Plato, fine-tuned his words with the most interesting of accents. Jacques Maritain sums it up very well: "*splendor veri said Plato, splendor ordinis said Saint Augustine, and splendor formae said Saint Thomas*". Although coursing through the veins of all these formulas is an irrepressible ambition to discover deeper explanations, if truth must be at the basis of all architectural creation that aspires to beauty, how could we consider order and form to be less important? Truth, and order and form. "*Form, as we well know, is not something superimposed; it is generated by the very material that reveals itself in it*" as José Angel Valente wrote so rightly when honoring

Chillida. How could we as architects not subscribe to form as the *“material that reveals itself in it”* in achieving beauty?

And I cannot resist laying before us here the considerations surrounding beauty that Saint Augustine made in identifying beauty with the Supreme maker:

*“Late have I loved you, beauty so ancient and so new: late have I loved you.*

*Lo, you were within me and I was in the external world*

*and sought you there, and in my unlovely state I plunged into the beauty of your creatures .*

*You were with me, but I was not with you.*

*They held me back far from you, which if they did not have their existence in you, had no existence at all.*

*You called and cried out loud and shattered my deafness.*

*You were radiant and resplendent, you banished my blindness.*

*You were fragrant, and I drew in my breath and now pant after you.*

*I tasted you, and I feel but hunger and thirst for you.*

*You touched me, and I am on fire to attain the peace which is yours”.*



**Investigation, precision and transcendence. Zubiri, Zambrano, Zweig**

Let us not however go off on intricate philosophical or theological tangents but return to the route that leads to beauty via Architecture.

And indeed, the motto on the shield of the AA Architectural Association London says: “*Design with Beauty, Build in Truth*”, which is an accurate summary of what we are discussing right now.

On the occasion of his Doctorate Honoris Causa conferral by the University of Oporto, I was asked for a text on Alvaro Siza in which I developed what I consider to be his three principal qualities as an architect, to a large degree as a factor of beauty, these being the three characteristics that I consider inherent in all Architecture participating in that much-desired beauty: an investigative nature, poetic precision and the capacity to transcend.

**Investigative nature.** One reaches beauty in architecture in the wake of rigorous, profound work that can and must be considered as a true work of research. Beauty is something profound, precise and concrete that rocks the very foundations of human civilization, that makes time stand still and ensures that the created work remains durable in time and in the memory of man. Beauty is not something superficial, vague or diffuse.

Not one of my projects has ever been just “another one”. In each and every one of them I have given my all. Each new project has been and is for me an opportunity to seek and find beauty. Each and every one of them has been conceived and designed and built with maximum intensity. With the intense conviction that architecture is the loveliest work in the world.

I have said “no” many times to many projects in which I wasn’t given enough freedom or which I considered were not interesting enough to devote my time to them. Some may call this pedantic. But I believe that this is the only way that one can create, that one can live creating, living with the intensity that makes this life worthwhile. All creators understand this very well: worthwhile poets and writers, musicians and painters and sculptors. I am absolutely certain that many of the academicians here today understand it very well.

When Xavier Zubiri was awarded the National Research Prize in 1982, he thanked Spanish society in his acceptance speech for being capable of understanding that philosophy is a true labor of research. Many times have I recommended to my students that they replace the word philosophy with architecture in that defining speech and the result is surprisingly apt. Because architecture is a true labor of research. And as Zubiri himself advised in his address, with guidance from Saint Augustine: *“Seek as those seek who still have not found, and find as those find who are still seeking”*.

**Poetic precision.** And the beauty we are discussing comes to architecture by the hand of precision. That same precision with which poetry is chiseled. When I defend the poetic nature that all architecture in search of beauty must have, I am not defending something vague and diffuse. I am looking for the precision required in poetry to achieve beauty, which is the same precision that I look for in architecture.

María Zambrano defined poetry as *“the word in harmony with the number”*. What better way to define the precision inherent in poetry. A word, which in one position says nothing special, placed in a precise position is capable of moving us and making time stand still right there. The same is true, with the same precision, in architecture. Because if Poetry is words conjugated with precision, capable of moving the hearts of men, so too is Architecture with its materials.

**Capacity of transcend.** Beauty appears in architecture that is capable of transcending us. Architecture that achieves beauty is an architecture that transcends us. The true creator, the true architect, is the one whose work transcends him. Stefan Zweig explains this so well in *The Secret of Artistic Creation*: *“There is no greater delight or satisfaction than recognizing that man too can create imperishable values and that eternally we remain united to the Eternal through our supreme effort on earth: through art”*. Zweig links that beauty with the Supreme Being, which Von Balthasar was to do more explicitly years later.

Moreover, that beauty that transcends us is not something unachievable or simply reserved for a few geniuses. I always try to convince my students that to achieve beauty is a possibility. It is possible to achieve works that are caressed by the *"sound of a gentle whisper"* with which the Divine Presence was confirmed in the sacred scriptures and which in architectural creation is the sign that beauty is present.

In Chapter 19. 11-12 of the Book of Kings we read: *"The angel said to the prophet Elias: 'Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by'. And Elias went out. And behold, a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake came a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper".* And there in that gentle whisper was the Lord.

So it is that same gentle whisper, the *sibilus aurae tenuis* as Saint Jerome writes in the *Vulgate*, that we architects yearn for our works of architecture, and what all creators long for. It is a clear sign that there is beauty in our works when they are worthwhile.

### **Utilitas, firmitas, venustas**

How could architects not understand that the truth of the idea generated by the fulfillment of function and

the truth of construction are essential if we are to achieve beauty in architecture? As Vitruvius so clearly stated: reaching *Venustas* demanded the prior and exact fulfillment of *Utilitas* and *Firmitas*.

**Utilitas.** "When it is said that Architecture must be functional, it stops being functional because it only attends to one of the many functions it has", Oiza so wisely stated.

Ósip Mandelstam at the beginning of his superb *Dialogue on Dante* said in reference to poetry: "Where a work can be measured by the yardstick of narration, the sheets have not been used, that is to say, (if I may be allowed the expression) Poetry has not spent the night there". So, in this very pedagogical way, Mandelstam explains the quid of the question in artistic creation. The narrative elements must never be central, nor should they be in architecture. The *Utilitas* demanded by Vitruvius as a primary condition, the function, must be fulfilled and fulfilled well. But architecture is something more, much more, than merely the perfect fulfillment of function. Function in architecture is the narration.

When Bernini revealed the white marble of the ever so beautiful *Proserpina raped by Pluto*, above and beyond the description of the scene and beyond the loveliness of the sculpture, what he is basically doing is demonstrating his capacity to make the hard Carrara marble appear soft, morbid. He manages to dominate the material, bending it, taming it. Something so much more universal than simply representing a scene. The strong hand of Pluto grips

Proserpina's delicate thigh and this is the over-riding interest of the sculpture, managing to make that which is hard appear soft. Once again the creator is conveying a universal theme that goes far beyond the mere narration of a story. Something more than just a sculpture. Bernini himself in each and every one of his architectures seeks and finds something more than the mere perfect fulfillment of a function or the mere perfect construction. He seeks and finds beauty.

This is what Alberto Corazón translates so graphically when speaking of painting: *"The vanguard movements of the 20th Century start out from a plate of apples by Cézanne, precisely because there are no apples there, only paint"*. And he continues: *"Reality is not what I look at, but what I see through memory. It is memory that illuminates it"*. And may I add, it is memory that makes us capable of discovering beauty. That is very clear.

**Firmitas.** And if in order to achieve beauty in architecture, the timely fulfillment of function, *Utilitas*, is important, none the less important is its good construction, *Firmitas*.

Viollet le Duc in his *Entretiens sur l'Architecture* defended the construction, *Firmitas*, as the fundamental basis of architecture. He called for the judicious and adequate expression of materials in order to attain beauty in Architecture. Beauty emanated from a well conceived and well constructed structure. *"Any form that does not adapt to the structure, must be repudiated"*. It is the structure which, as I have repeated so many times, in addition to bearing the load and

transmitting it to the ground, establishes the order of space; that establishment of the order of space, which is a central theme in Architecture.

From construction, which, of course, is a source of beauty, Rafael Manzano tells us: *"to the lintel and the column of Greece, Rome added new structural prototypes, the arch and the vault, and devoted all its energy to reconciling the Greek legacy, which transmitted beauty, with the new structural order, that was capable of building spaces very superior to what Greece had invented in dimensions and in building capacity, developing a most powerful architecture from which we still derive"*. And he adds: *"beauty in whose past is the future"*. It would seem that, aside from clarifying how much beauty in architecture owes to the guiding hand of *Firmitas*, it is as almost as if he were thinking in the opening lines of T.S. Eliot's first quartet, *Burnt Norton*: *"Time present and time past / are both perhaps present in time future / and time future contained in time past / if all time is eternally present / all time is unredeemable"*. Time and beauty, a theme that leads us on to another interesting dissertation.

**Venustas.** And finally, how could it be otherwise!, with the precise fulfillment of *Utilitas* and *Firmitas*, as prescribed by Vitruvius, comes *Venustas*, beauty.

### **Pantheon, Alhambra, Barcelona Pavilion**

Let us now take a look at some buildings that in the history of architecture have clearly materialized the ineffable beauty that we are discussing here.

Few buildings in history have the quality of making us lose the notion of time like the Pantheon in Rome. Not only does it fulfill its universal function to perfection, not only is it extremely well constructed, but it is also of undeniable beauty. All the great creators have understood that when they have seen it. Suffice it to quote Henry James when he describes the memorable scene of Count Valerio kneeling inside the Pantheon illuminated from above, by the light of the moon. The scene is quite beautiful. In this marvelous story, *The last of the Valerii*, the count states: "*This is the best place in Rome. It's worth fifty St Peter's*".

The Pantheon in Rome is an extraordinary container of beauty, of total beauty. If we stand with our backs against the wall inside the Pantheon, we feel that the space still fits inside our visual angle and therefore, inside our heads. Its 43 metres in diameter make possible the miracle that is the result of the application of precise measurements by Trajan's architect, Apollodorus of Damascus, to whom it is attributed. The same dimensions wisely used by Pedro Machuca in the courtyard of the Palace of Charles V in the Alhambra many years later. And the same dimensions which, having discovered the secret, that I myself used in the white patio of Granada.

From the point of view of *Utilitas* the Roman temple is universal, so universal that it still remains a space for the future. There is no other architecture in Rome so much of the future.



And in terms of *Firmitas*, it is so firm, so well constructed that it always emerged unscathed from the onslaughts it suffered. After its construction by Agrippa it suffered such a great fire that Hadrian had to reconstruct it. And even Domitian and Trajan were involved in it. And nothing happened, as Douglas Adams said of buildings destroyed and built again: "*it is always the same building*". And indeed the Pantheon, its beauty, is an idea, a built idea, precise in its dimensions and in its proportions and in its light. An enduring and eternal beauty. It is always the same building.

And if we are to speak of the light in the Pantheon we would never come to the end. Suffice a reference to Chillida embracing the column of light that entered through the oculus, who described the sensation: "*the illuminated air was lighter than the rest of the room*". Perhaps what he felt, what he touched, was the breath of that "*gentle whisper*".

Another paragon of Beauty is yet another architecture that was constructed, destroyed and reconstructed so many times while still remaining "*always the same building*": the Alhambra in Granada. Built by Yusuf I, reconstructed by Mohamed V, with the restoration of Mr. Leopoldo Torres Balbás in the last century. What could I at this stage say about the Alhambra? We have to go back to the lyrical passages that those vizier poets of the emirs of Granada recorded on the walls of the Alhambra. Ibn Zamrak puts the words in the mouth of the Alhambra itself, in the decoration of the fountain of Daraxa's garden, such lovely words

as these: *"And he has granted me the highest degree of beauty, so that my shape causes the admiration of the sages"* and without the least restraint continues: *"for never have any eyes seen a greater thing than myself, neither in the East nor in the West and in no time has any king, neither abroad nor in Arabia"*. And we would never finish if we were to continue with the beautiful inscriptions of the Alhambra. Beauty speaking about beauty itself.

Then there are the words dedicated by Barragán: *"Having made my way through a narrow and dark tunnel of the Alhambra, I was delivered to the serene, still, solitary and delightful courtyard of the myrtles of this ancient palace. It contained what a well crafted garden ought to contain: nothing less than the entire universe. I have never forgotten that memorable apparition and it is not accidental that from the first garden I did in 1941, all those that have followed humbly attempt to echo the immense lesson of the wisdom of the Alhambra of Granada"*.

Of course if we are to discuss contemporary architectures full of beauty, capable of resisting time, their physical destruction and their reconstruction, then we must speak of the Barcelona Pavilion of Mies van der Rohe, which appears to have been built only yesterday. Or tomorrow.

It is perhaps not only a synthesis of the principal conceptual achievements of modern architecture, but, in addition, a prodigy of beauty. A simple podium in Roman travertine, at the exact height for transporting us to another world. A light slab as a roof, perfectly tensioned, and supported, like

a dance on pointe, by cruciform pillars which, on account of their form and brilliance seem to vanish. Exquisite walls of onyx that serve as an epigraph to time with abstract signs and move with the freedom that the continuous space affords. And all with precise measurements and proportions: nothing over here, nothing over there, and the miracle takes place. An architecture that has conquered beauty forever.

These three examples of architecture are capable of resisting time and reconstruction while always remaining “the same building”. But, in addition, in all of them time stands still. In all of them past, present and future are there, suspended: time suspended for beauty to emerge. In all of them one can verify what Michael Bockemül expressed so well when referring to Rembrandt: *“he converts the conceptual understanding of the canvas into its visual perception”*. These three works of architecture convert so well their conceptual understanding into visual perception.

The three architectures cited here corroborate to what extent architecture is a built idea whose beauty remains forever, indestructible.

### **Mies van der Rohe, Le Corbusier, Wright**

I could not conclude this address without bringing before the Academy, however briefly, the words of some of the great maestros of contemporary architecture, Mies van der Rohe, Le Corbusier and Frank Lloyd Wright who,

unsurprisingly, constantly alluded to beauty as the ultimate goal of architecture.

**Mies.** Mies van der Rohe spoke prolifically about beauty. In a well-known text of his titled *Build in a beautiful and practical way. Enough of cold functionalism!* he tells us: “it seems completely clear to me that, on account of our modified needs and the appearance of new mediums that technology has placed at our disposal, we shall attain a new class of beauty”. “I do not think that we will ever again accept ‘beauty for itself’”. “Beauty is the splendor of truth”.

And he asked: “And what in reality is beauty? Most certainly, nothing that can be calculated, nothing that can be measured, but rather something ineffable. In architecture, beauty –which is equally necessary in our time and continues to constitute an objective, as it has been in previous ages- can only be achieved when something more than the mere finality is taken into account”. How could we not be in agreement with him?

On my table is a complete collection of Mies van der Rohe’s most important texts in a fine translation with a prologue by James Marston Fitch in which he says that Mies achieved “intrinsic beauty”, and that “he gave free rein to his platonic ideals of architectural perfection, of beauty”. I could not resist the temptation of underlining the word beauty in those texts, of knowing how much the maestro was preoccupied, obsessed even, with finding beauty in his work, with the result that beauty is the most repeated word.

**Le Corbusier.** And Le Corbusier was not to be outdone in his defense of beauty: *"The architect, by his arrangement of forms, realizes an order which is a pure creation of his spirit. Through forms and shapes, he affects our sense to an intense degree and provokes plastic emotions. Through the relationships which he creates he wakes in us profound echoes, he gives us the measure of an order which we feel to be in accordance with that of our world, he determines the various movements of our heart and our understanding. And it is then that we experience the sense of beauty"*.

**Wright.** And of Frank Lloyd Wright so many things could be said concerning beauty. But let us here just echo the last sentences of the manuscript found on his desk on the day of his death. In it he tells us: *"Architecture, the greatest of the arts, begins there where mere construction ends and the dominance of man is imposed"*. And he goes on to say *"The human being appears dependent on inspiration from a higher source. Because neither through legacy nor instinct does man attain beauty"*. And he continues: *"only when the spirit of man becomes conscious of the need for the benediction of beauty", "beauty attends and architecture appears, the greatest of mankind's arts. And in the same way, sculpture and painting and music"*. And he finishes with the very explicit words: *"When man proposed that beauty would enter in his buildings architecture was born"*.

### **Melnikov, Barragán, Shakespeare**

**Melnikov.** However following this incursion into the idea of beauty in Mies, Le Corbusier and Wright, for very

personal reasons, I cannot leave out Konstantin Melnikov, the Russian architect contemporary of all of them who best defines that beauty that some of us architects strive for: a bare, radical, essential beauty: *"Having become my own boss, I begged architecture in turn to take off her marble dress, remove her make-up and reveal herself as she is, naked, like a young and graceful goddess; and, as corresponds to true beauty, renounce being agreeable and obliging"*.

**And Barragán.** And for similar reasons, once again the words of Barragán. The universal Mexican maestro expresses himself clearly in relation to beauty in his Pritzker acceptance speech, 1982: *"Mr. Jay A. Pritzker stated in an announcement to the press that I had been chosen as the recipient of this prize for having devoted myself to architecture as a sublime act of poetic imagination. Consequently, I am only a symbol for all those who have been touched by beauty. It is alarming that publications devoted to architecture have banished from their pages the words beauty, inspiration, magic, spellbound, enchantment, as well as the concepts of serenity, silence, intimacy and amazement. All these have nestled in my soul, and though I am fully aware that I have not done them complete justice in my work, they have never ceased to be my guiding lights"*.

*"All those who have been touched by beauty"*, is not this Academy a propitious place within whose walls beauty is prepared to continue whispering to each and every one of the members of this house?

**And Shakespeare.** I have searched explicit references to beauty in the poets. And I have returned once again to Shakespeare, using a well-known bilingual edition. And when I found that the word beauty did not appear, as in that prestigious edition in Spanish only “beautiful” or “lovely” figured, I returned to the original in Shakespeare’s English and yet there is hardly a sonnet in which the word Beauty does not appear, that the traitorous translator did not dare to translate as beauty. Are they so afraid of the term beauty? How could Shakespeare not speak of beauty? And he starts his first sonnet with “*That thereby Beauty’s rose might never die*”. And he ends his last sonnet, the 54th, with “*O how much more doth Beauty beauteous seem*”. The term Beauty literally invades Shakespeare’s texts with its arms. How could it not be so! Just as all of us would like beauty to invade our works.

### **Hunger for beauty**

After all these considerations one ought to consider if beauty is or is not necessary, if it is or is not useful. Nuccio Ordine, in his brilliant essay on *The usefulness of the useless*, defends the need for useless beauty. Of course we could defend the contrary: that beauty is useful to satisfy the hunger pangs of the soul, the hunger for beauty that is in everyone. Of course beauty is useful, indispensable. Man hungers for beauty. *Venustas*, compatible and complementary to the usefulness of function, or good construction, is what really interests us.

Einstein summed it up rather well: *"I am in truth a solitary traveler, and the ideals which have lighted my way and time after time have given me new courage to face life cheerfully, have been Beauty, Kindness, and Truth"*.

### **Beauty, freedom, memory**

Francisco Calvo Serraller tells us *"the term beauty has had and always will have ample capacity to incorporate the 'desired free exploration of new perspectives' giving freedom as a reply to the question regarding the present-day meaning of beauty"*. And while it is not easy to completely comprehend ineffable beauty, we can readily understand that freedom found in memory.

Is not memory the deep and inexhaustible well for recognizing where beauty appears? How could someone devoid of memory recognize the fact that something, especially architecture, is part of beauty?

How could an architect be blown away by a Mies van der Rohe if he had not previously known of Palladio, or the Greek temples, or the Pantheon in Rome?

How could a painter admire Rothko without having adored Velázquez and Goya?

Today, fully immersed as we are in the third millennium, we are in no doubt about the depth of beauty in the paintings of Rothko or in the architecture of Mies van der Rohe. It is clear that the concept of beauty has not only opened its



doors but with the guiding hand of understanding it will always remain open.

And evidently this is largely true of Architecture. Nonetheless it may be as difficult for society to understand Rothko well as to really understand Mies van der Rohe. One of the merits of the masters of modern architecture has been managing to convince society that beauty was to be found in their works, that they were the bearers of beauty. Le Corbusier, Mies van der Rohe and Frank Lloyd Wright knew this very well and endeavored to do so and almost achieved it.

In short, capturing beauty and being capable of demonstrating it as such to society- beauty!

### **Coda**

And to end, let me tell you a brief anecdote, something that occurred very recently. Imagine the scene: on a visit to the wonderful exhibition on El Greco's Library in the Prado Museum, there I was, looking through the edition of Vitruvius, and perusing El Greco's detailed entries, when on page 28, where Vitruvius speaks about *Venustas*, suddenly I discover the handwritten sentence: "*That Venusta embraces it all*". That beauty embraces it all! That Venusta embraces it all, because born out of proportion, fortitude cannot be missing. What nicer way of summing up all that I want to say in this address. Because in truth beauty embraces our lives, beauty is all-encompassing. Clearly Vitruvius

had previously written: *“La Venusta procede dalla intelligenza dell’Architetto, l’utilità dalla bontà, et la fermezza dal potere”*. Absolutely clear.

### **Quasi Finale**

I have pursued beauty vigorously. I have sought beauty with tireless dedication. I have chased after beauty desperately. I have searched and still search and will continue to search for beauty unto death or until I kill her. When I kill her with love on finding her because I have put my heart and soul to it. That much coveted beauty that many of you academicians listening to me today also strive to achieve with your art, every day of your lives.

### **Finale**

Being the last to enter this house, I hope to contribute towards maintaining the doors and windows of this prestigious institution wide open to allow in the light and air and freedom that the Academy looks for. And at the hand of freedom, beauty. The same beauty that permeates this beautiful building, the San Fernando Royal Academy of Fine Arts. From its interior with its superb Churriguera staircase which is a joy to tread, to the noble facade on Alcalá Street by Diego de Villanueva that stands out for its discreet sobriety. Here is beauty as the splendor of truth, of order and appropriate form.

Because the search for beauty always speaks of the search for freedom. Seeking in architecture the freedom arising from the radicalism of undeniable reason agreed with the desirable dream, always leads to truth resulting in beauty. The English poet Keats encapsulated it to perfection in the well-known lines of his Ode on a Grecian Urn :

*“Beauty is truth, truth beauty, -that is all / Ye know on earth,  
and all ye need to know”.*

REPLY BY ACADEMICIAN  
H. E. MR. JUAN BORDES CABALLERO

It gives me great pleasure to welcome Alberto Campo Baeza to this Royal Academy of Fine Arts of San Fernando on behalf of our Corporation that designated him to occupy a numbered place in the Architecture Section for his relevant creative activity in Spanish contemporary architecture.

Firstly I must confess that when Alberto asked me to reply to his speech I was surprised at his decision, because knowing me as he does, he was apparently choosing a rather distant view of his aesthetic tactics: however I considered that such a difference would not be a drawback to accepting the honor, as evidently all of us creators travel along different routes while all aspiring to the same goals.

A similar situation arose some years ago when he asked if I would participate with my sculpture in one of his works, and I did not refuse on that occasion either, although in the end the project never came to fruition. At the time I interpreted his request for collaboration to be seeking the same counterpoint in my work that Mies van der Rohe looked for in the sculpture of Kolbe, providing a knot of tension in his magically balanced raft, which is the mythical Barcelona Pavilion. Indeed that work (which Campo Baeza also quoted), has always struck me as one of the triumphs of 20th century architecture, and the best example of dialogue between architecture and sculpture in the entire modern movement. Furthermore I cannot imagine that masterpiece of serenity conversing with the synthetic sculpture of Brancusi or Arp, nor even with the best of any of the best

constructivists, as Mies knew well that speculative dialogue would not have been so enriching and disturbing.

And so it was with enthusiasm that I received Campo Baeza's challenge of replying to such a complex and beautiful address as the one we have just heard; as it seemed that his confidence provided me with sufficient baggage with which to take on the risk of engaging in dialogue with the overwhelming security of his reflections. And I say dialogue, because the first thing I did was to warn Campo Baeza that if I were to take it on, I would be putting forward opinions contradictory to his, something which he not only deemed perfect, but confirmed as being exactly what he was hoping for. And so, after this pact of ours, I began to think that our little confrontation would be an opportunity of turning the event into a clear demonstration that he is not becoming part of an institution of monolithic thought. I believe that not now, nor in the past has the Academy been a community of uniform opinion, as ever since its foundation in the 18th century it has always welcomed individuality with open arms. And those who are interested in the people who have been and are today its members endorse this view. Nonetheless for those with a more superficial knowledge of our Corporation, that reality may not be so obvious.

Before engaging in any ostensible confrontation on the dialectic exercise of his address, I should like to express my most devoted admiration to the work of Alberto Campo

Baeza, which is moreover the sincere reflection of his singular personality. A work which undoubtedly manages to achieve the beauty which he tells us he so relentlessly seeks, and in doing so has decided to follow the route of purification to asceticism, away from architectures that squander resources in attention-seeking exercises amidst much hue and cry. He, by contrast, has opted for silence and a subtle iconography. And that calm presence of the visual, which never dominates in his architecture, means that his buildings are not enjoyed with sight alone; they also engage discourse with the other senses. And for that reason, in order to transmit his work solely with visual images I had to look to extraordinary photographers such as Hisao Suzuki, Roland Halbe, Javier Callejas and Duccio Malagamba, who in addition to reflecting his luminous spaces, were faced with the difficult task of conveying in their photographs other sensations contained in the architecture of our new academician that only the calm and tranquil visitor to his works can fully grasp.

And indeed Campo Baeza in his select creative work has demonstrated his generosity; it is clearly evident that he has never spared intensity in any of projects, all of them inimitable pieces. But in them, certifying what we have just said, he also demonstrates his ambition, which is nothing else but the ambition of creative freedom and the desire to make a work that is transcendent in itself, even above the survival of his own name. Similarly generosity and intensity are qualities of his personality that he pours into his

other work, his teaching; for, like all creators, he is deeply conscious of the responsibility of transmitting and serving as a catalyst for the enthusiasm of future generations.

So, precisely in view of the weight of his work, it is rather bold of me to open up a debate on a speech conceived with the most absolute certitudes, besides being armed with quotations of undeniable authority. Nevertheless I wish to justify my disagreement with a position that only has the force of doubt.

On the other hand, the rectitude of the path described for us by Campo Baeza in his address and with which he describes to us his ideals, I suspect in reality to be a solid screen of impregnable arguments that defend him from interference with the authentic nucleus of his creation, which is his overriding desire to find beauty. And I consider that he disguises that quality with arguments of rationality, perhaps to modestly devalue his merits. I have used the word “find”, because deep-down I doubt that he is searching for beauty, for certainties are not the basis of a creator; as Picasso said: *“I do not search, I find”*, and certainly if Alberto were searching for beauty he already knew what he had to find, and if that is so... why search?

It is true that for his students and as a teacher (which, in my view is the personality that comes across most strongly in his speech), he must strive to disseminate the use of reason or common sense, (in other words, the most usual) as a pre-condition to becoming an architect, but it is not sufficient. While the possession of a powerful intuition is a



god-given gift, the exercise of reason is the gymnastics of a good education. It is true that as a teacher he is obliged to promote among his students the desire to achieve at least an accessible level of discreet beauty, or "*gentle whisper*", using his words, citing the Scriptures. However, achieving the extreme heights of beauty or "*the sublime*", already named in a 1st-century treatise attributed to Longinus... that is a giant step, which only he, with his intuition, is capable of making.

It is evident that architectural creation is not like the creative work of the sculptor, given that during the creative process of the architect there are many more moments of analysis and rational project than bursts of intuition. Nevertheless it is these fleeting instants that define the inspiration necessary to make buildings that are Architecture with a capital "A". And this we see so well in the intimate writings in the notebooks of great architects where they keep their first scribbles or doodles: gestural and irrational sketches like those of Erich Mendelsson, that in subsequent weeks became transformed into the documentation of a project where constructive rules, gravitation and structural calculus began to impose rationality and limits on top of his fantasy.

It is true that in an architectural project, as on a chessboard, the geometric rationality of the grid apparently dominates. Thus in a chess game alongside the pieces moving orthogonally others are diagonally vigilant. Nevertheless the greatest surprise is produced when the knight jumps,

always causing consternation as it combines both possibilities. The rules of chess are quite simple, and combine the actions of the various pieces with decisions based on lengthy reasoning and a careful evaluation of the opponent's possible reply, but only a flash of intuition can produce that gesture of beauty in carrying off a master move.

Campo Baeza assures us that he subjects his search for beauty to the same maxim that Goya articulated in his famous etching, nevertheless I believe that when creating he does exactly the same as the great Aragonese genius, who I do not believe ever applied that maxim to his art work; quite a different matter is whether it was a motto for his behaviour and life, which I actually also doubt. While we may look upon Goya as an enlightened gentleman, I am sure that he put reason to bed when he took out his brushes or gravers. Were this not so, his drawing could not have dreamt up such fascinating monsters, nor would his brush have had the precision and cruelty of the scalpel in the dissection of his great portraits. I think that Goya was more in line with what Cervantes wrote for the tomb of Don Quijote: *"A crazy man his life he passed, but in his senses died at last"*.

Personally I believe that Goya's intention in inserting his famous maxim in that aquatint, was not referring in a specific sense to the method of creation, as that particular print, like all those of the series *Los Caprichos*, belongs to a general discourse of social and political satire. It is my feeling that with this saying Goya was pointing to the

madness of politicians who were asleep to the outcry of the people and whose decisions produced monsters. I believe that the meaning of the sentence may have been changed by its use out of context. However much we may support the supposed interpretations of Goya conserved in the Prado Museum document; and even should the authorship of that interpretation be certain, one has to mistrust Goya as he would never have revealed their true meaning, thus protecting his impunity and ensuring his continued harsh criticism of his contemporaries.

Moreover, in the address we have just heard from Campo Baeza it would appear that he is only indicating one source of beauty, simplifying the complex contradictions that so abundantly enrich his work, where his intellectual, pristine implications are at odds with his more sensual and tactile treatment of his materials. And certainly the sources of beauty can be as varied as those that search for it relentlessly in the mind of Apollo, or those who in their search look to the sensuality of Dionysus. Both routes are equally valid and neither of them have guidelines carved out by reason instructing us to walk along them, for if they did, we would be drowning in beautiful works...and thank God! (or the devil himself) that is not the case, for we would in the end become insensitive to what so rarely occurs.

Equally I disagree with Campo Baeza when, supported by the words of great masters, he speaks of pursuing truth,. I cannot believe him in this, as being a great creator himself

he must understand that there is no greater creative act than deceit. Writers know this well, the authors of fables and stories of people who never existed, but who appear more real to the reader than life itself. Take, for example a fine narrator like Paul Sheerbart in his *Glasarchitektur* (1914) who fabricated in our minds the glass cathedral that lets the sunlight in, and whose coloured glass displays all the colours of the spectrum. However, only a “no” denying its existence will make this magnificent building collapse, which his description built up in our minds.

It is with deception that Campo Baeza tricks our perception and makes a space with a given number of square meters feel as if it were double that figure. Not for nothing did Edmund Burke tell us in 1756 in his inquiry into *Ideas on the sublime and the beautiful*: “A true artist should put a generous deceit on his spectators,(...) Designs that are vast only by their dimensions are always the sign of a common and low imagination. No work of art can be great, but as it deceives; to be otherwise is the prerogative of nature only”. (Part 1, Sec X : *Magnitude in Building*).

And the deception of the architect affects even the straight line, as it is at odds with our perception, which is why the human eye imposes the need for subtle curved corrections to perceive its straightness. I consider it indeed to have been a great conquest of modern architecture to rid itself of historicist iconographies, nonetheless I do not equally rejoice over the fact that the majority of modern architects

forget the optical refinements employed by classical architecture in attending to the subtle deformations perceived by the human eye. Since that break when functional problems and an iconographic longing for sincere translation came to the fore of architectural composition, perceptive concerns in architectural projects regarding the visual refinements of the past seem to have disappeared. And, coincidentally, this occurred at a time when research was concentrating on perception, as we have seen in the work of the Gestalt theorists. While already the curve of the entasis or the problems of “the resupination of image” had been dealt with by Vitruvian treatises throughout history, other more complex optical regulations were discovered by various studies and measurements in the 19th Century. Thus Harol Donalson was the first to observe the inclination of columns in his work *Essai sur le temple dorique* (1829). Francis C. Penrose with his exhaustive work *An Investigation of the Principles of Athenian Architecture* (1851) described for the first time the horizontal curves of entablatures and stylobates in Greek monuments, managing to pinpoint their measurements in feet to four decimals. Further clarification on perceptive manipulation in monuments was provided by John Pennethorne in his weighty study *Geometry and Optics of Ancient Architecture* (1878). And all these investigations showed that the irregularities observed through very exact measuring corresponded to a premeditated plan, where deceiving the eye is the aim in achieving beauty.

And we could go on with this game of unveiling the

contradictions in the address of our new academician, but the very existence of these contradictions makes it beautiful. However the last of these goes beyond the limits of tolerance and I must dispute El Greco's words in which Campo Baeza advocates the condition of proportion as necessary for beauty. And while I do not dispute the annotation he cites for us of El Greco defending this statement in his handwritten comments on an edition of Vitruvius annotated by Barbaro conserved in our National Library, I must dispute the beautifully expressed disproportion of the painter's statement ... just like the beautiful monstrosity of Goya. And to express my thoughts on proportion and beauty, avoiding the over-use of external authorities, I shall once more cite Burke: in the 3rd part of his treatise, in sections repeatedly entitled *Proportion not the cause of beauty in vegetables*, (*Idem*) *in animals* and (*Idem*) *in the human species*, he concludes with a chapter entitled *Perfection not the cause of beauty*. And he writes "I have great reason to doubt whether beauty be an idea belonging to proportion. Proportion relates almost wholly to convenience, as every idea of order seems to do; and it must therefore be considered as a creature of the understanding, rather than a primary cause acting on the senses and imagination. It is not by the force of long attention and inquiry that we find any object to be beautiful; beauty demands no assistance from our reasoning (...) the appearance of beauty as effectually causes some degree of love in us, as the application of ice or fire produces the ideas of heat or cold. (...) beauty is no idea belonging to mensuration; nor has it anything to do with calculation and geometry".

But after so many certainties signed by great thinkers with which Campo Baeza has endorsed his speech, I confess that my dialectic capacity is slow and that except on very few questions, my convictions are weak. And for that reason I hardly ever defend them, because I would be leaving myself open to the overwhelming arguments of those with oppressive dogmas and certainties who normally with minimum argument succeed in winning me over. That is what happens only at first, for then when their defender disappears I invariably end up doubting the arguments employed in their defense.

Therefore, if after all these negations I appear devoid of ideas, I must propose another motto similar to the one proposed by Alberto Campo Baeza in which I am fully confident, and which in essence displays my full agreement with his, which is his intention and his achievement. And in saying so, I must first recognize that the term beauty, although once again on the lips of many, not only seems to still imply an idea of respect and longing for the past which I do not have, but for a long time it was charged with rules and dogmas that try to make it unique. Therefore, dear Alberto, I would have titled it *Relentlessly seeking fascination* because I consider that substitution, while meaning the same, better defines the aspiration to leave creation open to future forms of enchantment.

And having said all this, the Academy is indeed honored with the entry of such a remarkable new member.

